

# **Preliminary 2006 Seasonal Wildland Fire Assessment**

## **Northern Rockies Geographic Area**

### **April 10, 2006**

#### **Executive Summary**

The Northern Rockies Geographic Area should enjoy a **NORMAL** 2006 fire season. This assessment is based on differences among current and historical conditions. It should be noted that there are a myriad of factors affecting the total number of fires, acres and firefighting resources utilized which cannot be predicted, or cannot be predicted with any confidence this far in advance.

A typical fire season begins mid to late June and lasts until a normal season ending event by mid September. A late fire season occurs across the plains of eastern Montana and North Dakota in late fall and are associated with strong wind events.

What we know:

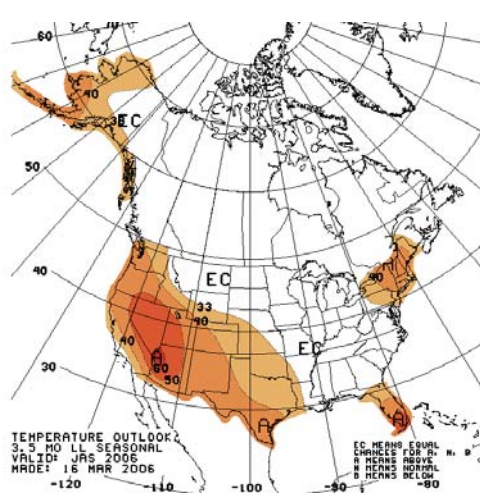
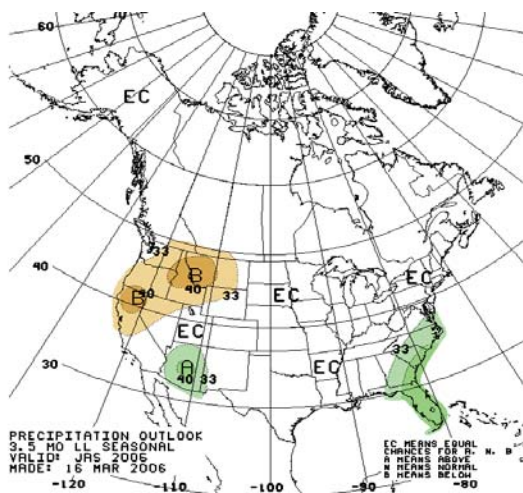
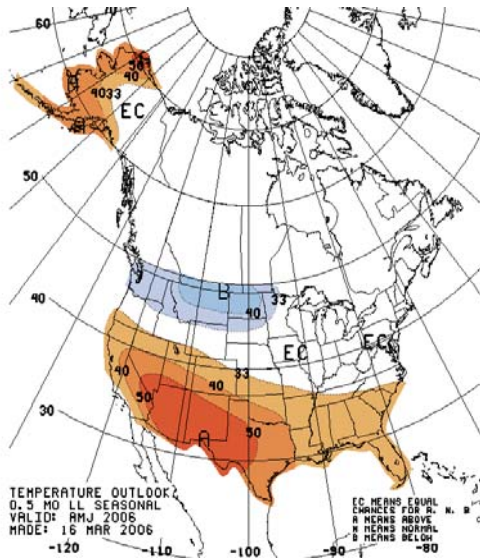
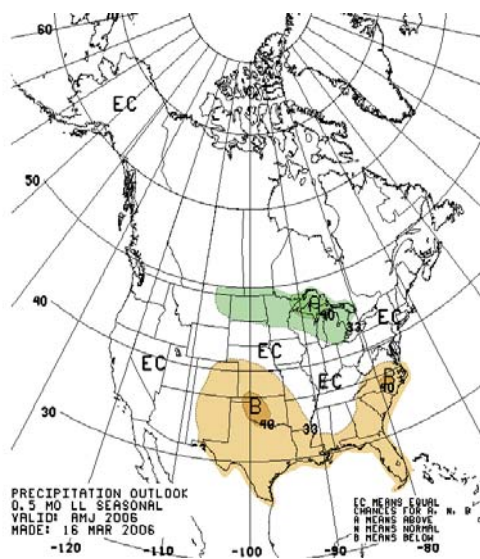
- Weak La Nina has had a significant influence across the area.
- Temperatures generally above normal across the area.
- Normal to above normal precipitation and snow pack for most of the area.
- 8<sup>th</sup> year of drought conditions.
- 1000 hour fuel moisture at normal levels.
- Beetle kill acreage has increased.
- Fuel loading continues to be heavy.

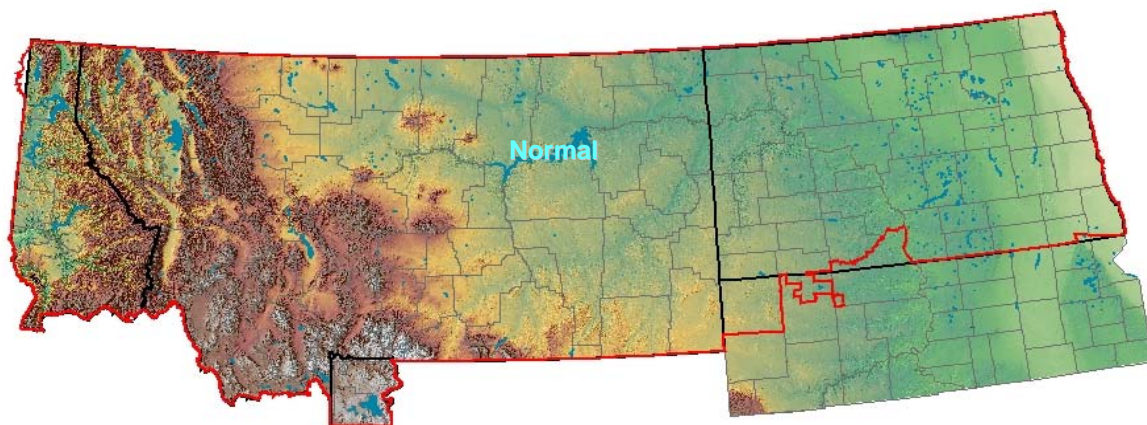
What we are predicting:

- Below average temperatures and normal precipitation for April, May and June.
- Above average temperatures and below average precipitation for July, August, September...not good.
- Weak La Nina continues to influence weather for 3 to 6 more months.
- Abundant fine fuels in response to winter/spring precipitation.
- Prescribed burning may be hindered by wet spring.
- Heavy snow pack may delay onset of fire season especially at higher altitudes.

The potential for a large active fire season depends largely on how much moisture occurs in the spring and the amount of precipitation in July. Normal to above normal moisture typically produces a normal to below normal fire season. Below normal moisture during these months tends to produce an above normal potential for a large fire season.

Assuming normal spring moisture and normal to slightly below normal precipitation in July, a forecast of a normal fire season seems reasonable. Confidence in precipitation forecasts this far in advance must be assessed as low. A better picture of the upcoming season will be available at the end of May and this assessment will be updated accordingly.





Northern Rockies  
2006 Seasonal Outlook